United Nations S/PV.4037

Security Council
Fifty-fourth Year

Provisional

4037th Meeting
Wednesday, 25 August 1999, 11.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gurirab	(Namibia)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Petrella
	Bahrain	Mr. Buallay
	Brazil	Mr. Fonseca
	Canada	Mr. Fowler
	China	Mr. Shen Guofang
	France	Mr. Doutriaux
	Gabon	Mr. Dangue Réwaka
	Gambia	Mr. Jagne
	Malaysia	Mr. Mohammad Kamal
	Netherlands	Mr. van Walsum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Slovenia	Mr. Türk
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Eldon
	United States of America	Ms. Soderberg

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

99-85684E (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one week of the date of publication*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178.

The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Children and armed conflict

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Costa Rica, Egypt, Finland, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Kenya, Monaco, Mongolia, Mozambique, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Slovakia, South Africa, the Sudan, Uganda, Ukraine, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan), Mr. Baali (Algeria), Ms. Coelho Da Cruz (Angola), Mr. Hossain (Bangladesh), Mr. Sychov (Belarus), Mr. Sacirbey (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica), Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt), Ms. Rasi (Finland), Mr. Insanally (Guyana), Mr. Sharma (India), Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia), Mr. Hasan (Iraq), Mr. Takasu (Japan), Ms. Odera (Kenya), Mr. Boisson (Monaco), Mr. Enkhsaikhan (Mongolia), Mr. Chomar (Mozambique), Mr. Powles (New Zealand), Mr. Hønningstad (Norway), Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines), Mr. Monteiro (Portugal), Mr. Lee (Republic of Korea), Mr. Ubalijoro (Rwanda), Mr. Tomka (Slovakia), Mr. Kumalo (South Africa), Mr. Erwa (Sudan), Mr. Beyendeza (Uganda), Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine), Mr. Mwakawago (United Republic of Tanzania) and Mr. Kasanda (Zambia) took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, if I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation to the Permanent Observer of Switzerland to the United Nations to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Maurer (Switzerland), took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

The first speaker on my list is the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Otunnu: Mr. President, you are not a newcomer to this Chamber. For over two decades, the South West Africa People's Organization knocked at the door of the Council and you sat at this corner of the table, pleading the cause of freedom and independence for the people of Namibia. Today, Namibia is free. It is not only a Member of the United Nations, but an active member of the Security Council. We rejoice with the people of Namibia on this happy turn of events. And today, you, Sir, are the President of the Security Council; in a few weeks you will assume the presidency of the General Assembly; for several years now, you have been the dean of Foreign Ministers hailing from Africa. I congratulate you, Mr. President, on these very impressive achievements.

I wish the Government and the people of Namibia great success in their admirable endeavours to consolidate unity and democracy at home while contributing actively to building peace and security in the world.

I should like here to pay a very special tribute to a remarkable leader. I refer to Madam Graça Machel of Mozambique and South Africa. Her ground-breaking work, which provided the first comprehensive and compelling account of the ways in which children are being abused and brutalized in situations of conflict, provided the strong foundation on which we are building today. The front-line work of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Union — these particularly — strongly supported by the community of international and local non-governmental organizations, together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), have been crucial in translating our common agenda into practical realities that can make a difference for children on the ground. I am very grateful for their cooperation and support, and I look forward to our continuing and very close collaboration.

Children are innocent and especially vulnerable. Children are less equipped to adapt or respond to conflict. They bear no responsibility for conflict, yet suffer disproportionately from its excesses. All non-combatants are entitled to protection, but children deserve special attention and require special protection. Moreover, children represent the hopes and future of every society; destroy them and you have destroyed a society.

Yet today, we are witnessing unspeakable abominations directed against children in situations of conflict: children being killed; children being made orphans; children being maimed; children being uprooted from their homes; children being raped and sexually abused; children being deprived quite simply of their education and health; children being exploited as child soldiers; and children being left with deep emotional scars and trauma.

As we meet here today, in approximately 50 countries around the world, children are suffering from the effects of conflict and its aftermath. Today, there are over 20 million children who have been displaced by war within and outside their countries. Some 300,000 young persons under the age of 18 are currently being exploited as child soldiers.

The magnitude of what we are witnessing attests to a new phenomenon. There has been a qualitative shift in the nature and conduct of warfare.

Several developments mark this transformation. Almost all the major armed conflicts in the world today are civil wars. They are being fought among brother enemies and sister enemies. They are marked by widespread social breakdown and lawlessness, the proliferation of weapons, the involvement of multiple armed groups and the massive use of children as child soldiers. A key feature of this struggle is the demonization of the so-called enemy community. In this setting the village has become the battlefield and civilian populations the primary target. This is soldier-on-civilian violence on an unprecedented scale. The excesses are no longer exceptional. They are widespread around the globe. They are going on today in some 30 locations of conflict.

It is against this background that today we estimate that up to 90 per cent of casualties in ongoing conflicts around the world are civilians, and the vast majority are children and women.

There is a danger that we in the international community may be exposed so much that we could come to regard as normal a phenomenon that in fact represents a radical departure from the fundamental norms of conduct acceptable to any of our societies. We must not allow this to happen.

We can and must reverse this trend of abomination. In this context, I wish to put forward some concrete proposals for the Council's consideration.

First, let us resolve, on the eve of the new millennium, to launch an era of application, the application of international norms and standards. Over the past 50 years, the nations of the world have developed a truly impressive body of international humanitarian and human rights instruments.

But the impact of these instruments remains woefully thin on the ground. We must therefore shift our energies from the juridical project of the elaboration of norms to the political project of ensuring their application and respect on the ground. This can be accomplished if the international community is prepared to employ its considerable collective influence to this end.

My second recommendation concerns reinforcing traditional value systems. We must not cast aside local traditional value systems that have traditionally provided ethical bearings to many of our societies. In most societies distinctions always existed between acceptable and unacceptable practices even in times of war, with taboos and injunctions proscribing the targeting of civilian populations, especially women and children. But today in so many conflicts around the world, we see a free-for-all.

I am reminded of the observation made by a Kenyan elder from El Das recently. He said quite simply:

> "In our tradition, men fight men. But now they are targeting women, children and the elderly."

We must mobilize all our resources — especially parents, extended family, elders, teachers, schools, religious institutions — to reclaim and reassert those values and taboos that have traditionally been instrumental in protecting children and women in times of conflict.

Thirdly, there is the concept of children as a zone of peace. We must undertake concrete initiatives to prevent or mitigate the suffering of children who are actually caught up in ongoing conflict. In other words, we must translate the concept of "Children as a Zone of Peace" into practical arrangements and measures on the ground.

In my recent visits to several countries, parties in conflict have committed themselves to some of the following measures: not to interfere with access to populations in distress or with the distribution of relief supplies, to observe humanitarian ceasefires, not to attack schools or hospitals, not to use landmines and not to recruit children as child soldiers. But the international community must steadfastly hold the parties in conflicts to these commitments. It is critical that concerned actors — beginning with the Security Council, plus Governments, regional organizations, United Nations agencies and civil society organizations — reinforce these commitments through their own channels of communication and influence.

My fourth recommendation concerns neighbourhood initiatives. Although most of today's armed conflicts are internal, the victimization of children is often exacerbated by cross-border activities, the transfer of weapons, the use of landmines, the recruitment and abduction of children and the movement of displaced populations. Threats facing children within countries in conflict often cannot be brought under control without addressing the cross-border dimensions. That is why we have proposed the development of "neighbourhood initiatives". The idea is to develop dialogue that would ultimately lead to specific agreements and concrete measures at the neighbourhood level on cross-border threats to children.

Fifthly, the business community should be engaged. There is an urgent need to monitor and control the flow of weapons, especially small arms, and the exploitation of natural resources in theatres of conflict, where there is evidence that children and women are being systematically brutalized. Illicit trade in timber, gold or diamond tends to fuel the war machines responsible for atrocities against children and women. I urge the business community to assume their social and moral responsibility in this regard. For a start, I urge them to develop voluntary codes of conduct within their own industries to address this serious issue.

Sixthly, children's protection and welfare should be placed on the peace agenda. Children suffer disproportionately in times of war, and therefore they have the highest stake in peace. That is why we must ensure that their protection and needs feature prominently in any negotiations to end war and in peace accords. I am pleased that this is beginning to be the case in the peace processes in Burundi, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Colombia.

Seventh, the needs of children in the aftermath of conflict must be addressed. Even when fighting stops, children will continue to bear physical, social and psychological scars and to suffer the long-term consequences of war. In post-conflict situations, children's needs must be at the forefront of sustained efforts for reconstruction, the consolidation of peace and the support of local rehabilitation. At the international level, the key actors must make this central in their programmes and in their planning. At the national level, I am equally convinced that there is need for a national body, perhaps a national commission on children, to ensure an effective response to the needs of children affected by war.

Eighth, special attention should be paid to the protection and welfare of children in the context of peace operations. Particular attention needs to be paid to the protection and welfare of children in United Nations mandated field operations aimed at promoting peace, preventing and resolving conflicts and implementing peace agreements. There are three distinct elements which are important in this regard. First, the needs of

children should be explicitly recognized as a priority in the mandates. Secondly, to ensure the implementation of such mandates, there should be a senior officer dedicated to coordinating and ensuring that the welfare of children is respected. And thirdly, we believe that training must be given to all members of a peacekeeping team, civilian and military, on issues regarding the protection, welfare and rights of women and children.

A ninth recommendation concerns the importance of reporting to the Security Council on the fate of children. It is important, in our view, that whenever reports are submitted to the Council on situations of armed conflict and related humanitarian emergencies, such reports should include assessments of the impact of those situations on children. This will provide the Council with information on the basis of which the protection and welfare of children can be addressed on an ongoing basis.

A tenth point is the need to review the effects of sanctions on children. All efforts should be made to relieve the suffering of children living under sanctions regimes. Whenever the Security Council adopts measures under Article 41, it is critical to give consideration to their impact on children and to provide appropriate humanitarian exemptions.

An eleventh point concerns the voice of children. I have been struck by the absence of and hunger for information and recreation among children in situations of conflict and its aftermath. We therefore need to develop in those situations radio stations and programmes devoted entirely to the needs of children in situations of conflict and its aftermath.

A twelfth recommendation relates to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The participation of children in armed conflict is one of the most horrendous trends of recent times. To stem the present tide, we need to adopt a three-pronged approach.

First, I support the efforts to raise the age limit for recruitment and participation from 15 to 18 years. Secondly, parallel with the efforts to raise the age limit, we must mobilize right now an effective movement of international pressure that can lean on the armed groups that are currently abusing children in this way. Thirdly, and equally important, we must address the political, social and economic factors that create an environment in which children are induced by appeal of ideology or by socio-economic collapse to become child soldiers.

As regards signing and ratifying international instruments, I strongly urge all Member States to sign and ratify those international legal instruments that afford protection to children in situations of armed conflict. I am referring in particular to the Statute of the International Criminal Court and the recent International Labour Organization Convention, adopted in June of this year.

As regards providing for children in situations of imperfect peace, I have been struck by the fact that even in situations of imperfect peace there are often spaces for responding more systematically to the needs and welfare of children. I have seen this in Rwanda, in the Sudan, in Burundi, in Colombia and in Sierra Leone. Child protection and welfare must not depend on the attainment of complete peace, but should be provided whenever the space exists to do so.

Turning to the situation of internally displaced communities, on my missions this past year I have everywhere witnessed the deeply distressing and precarious situation of internally displaced populations. In fact, most of the children I have encountered in my visits were internally displaced within their countries. Their predicament underlines the need and the urgency for the international community to find a way to provide more systematic protection and practical support to the some 25 million persons presently displaced within their own national borders. Most of these people are children and women.

The magnitude of this problem has been brought home to us by Mr. Francis Deng. The guidelines he has produced on internally displaced persons should be widely disseminated and used by Governments, parties in conflict and the humanitarian community as a whole.

Ultimately, the best way to end to the suffering of children is to prevent the occurrence and recurrence of conflict. In order to prevent the occurrence and recurrence of conflict, both international and national actors have a responsibility to take political, economic and social measures that can generate within communities a sense of hope in place of despair, a sense of inclusion and participation instead of exclusion and a sense of belonging instead of alienation.

In conclusion, I must tell the Council how, in my recent visits to countries affected by conflict, I have been so deeply touched and humbled by examples of ordinary people doing extraordinary things within their local

communities. I think of the host families I visited in Albania and Macedonia, in Kukes and Tetovo. They were ordinary and, for the most part, very poor families, with nothing to spare. But in an extraordinary demonstration of solidarity and generosity, they opened their homes and hearts to more than 50 refugees from Kosovo, most of whom were children and women.

I think of my visit last February to a little village in Burundi called Ruiigi. We have all been told that in Burundi and Rwanda Tutsi and Hutu can never get along with each other. But in Ruiigi I encountered three remarkable people — Maggy, Beatrice and Isaac — who by their examples have repudiated this paradigm.

Maggy is a Tutsi woman who in her village during the upheavals of 1993 witnessed unspeakable inter-communal massacres, even in the secretariat of the church where she worked. She determined at that time to become a revolutionary for peace and reconciliation among the Hutu and the Tutsi. She resolved to rebuild homes for child survivors of these massacres, children of all ethnic groups. When I visited I saw several of these homes.

In Ruiigi, I encountered another remarkable woman — Beatrice, a Hutu — who is now working with Maggy to take care of these children. Beatrice fled Burundi in 1972 during an earlier set of massacres. She went to Rwanda and met another Hutu refugee from Burundi, got married and had eight children. In 1994, following the genocide in Rwanda, the family fled to the Congo. In 1997 their camp was attacked and her entire family was massacred. She was the only survivor. Beatrice walked back to Burundi, met Maggy from her village, and the two women exchanged stories. The two women determined together that they would make common cause across the Tutsi-Hutu divide.

When I met Beatrice I asked her how it felt, after what she had experienced, to be taking care of those children. She looked me in the face, gave a confident smile and said, "Working here with Maggy, taking care of these children, has given back to me the dignity of a mother."

And then I think of my visit to Juba in southern Sudan, of my reunion with my university roommate Dr. Paul Tingwa, who at the time was a refugee in my native country of Uganda. Now he is running a hospital in the middle of a war zone, with barely any shirt on his back or shoes on his feet. But he is holding on tenaciously in this zone because of the desperate need of the children and women in that area.

I remember the evening I spent with the women of the Kuku and Yei camps in southern Sudan — women who, in spite of their adversity and suffering, were singing and rejoicing. They simply defied the fate imposed upon them by war. They were busy building schools and huts for their children. They asked for only two things. First, they told me, "Go tell our leaders and the international community we just want peace." Their second request: "We want some assistance with schooling for our children."

I think of my visit to Rwanda, where I met some of the 60,000 children who from one day to the next became the heads of households because all their parents had been massacred.

More recently I was in Colombia. I think of a visit to camps for internally displaced persons, in Quibdo and elsewhere. The children there are so full of energy, so eager to learn, so cheerful, ready to go — but they have no opportunities. They only ask for a little help for schooling or health care.

I say that we of the international community must get closer to these communities. We must learn from them. We must draw inspiration from their example, and we must reinforce their local efforts.

This is why, in spite of the suffering I have seen and the adversity in the places I have visited, I have come back with a renewed sense of hope, and I say to the Council and the rest of the international community that the way forward to help these communities that are caught in the midst of war and its aftermath is to go women, go children, go local.

I thank you, Sir, for your initiative in convening this meeting.

The President: I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for the kind words he addressed to my country and to me.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Colombia, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in

accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia) took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

Mr. Eldon (United Kingdom): As the Special Representative said, Mr. President, you are no newcomer to this Chamber. But as the first Council member to speak in this debate, I should nevertheless like to welcome you here. I much enjoyed working with you during your country's transition to independence, when I was here in a more junior capacity in the 1980s. It is a special pleasure to see you here today in your current capacity.

Modern conflicts hit children the hardest. An estimated two million have been killed in wars in the last decade. Tens of millions of others have been orphaned, maimed, traumatized, sexually abused, tortured or starved. We all have an obligation to do everything in our power to stop this.

Conflict prevention is clearly the best way to protect children. And conflict prevention is best done by promoting democracy and development, by ensuring respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and good governance. These principles must be taken seriously. As the Special Representative has said, Governments must respect their international obligations, including under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has now been ratified by nearly all Members of the United Nations. We must all speak out more clearly when they do not. This is one instance where naming and shaming helps.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has a particularly damaging impact on children. The existence of so much weaponry in difficult and sensitive areas of the world is in itself destabilizing. The United Kingdom has been working to tackle the problem of proliferation of light weapons, for example through the European Union (EU) Joint Action on small arms, which provides a basis for funding small-arms projects in third countries, and through support for the Economic Community of West African States moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of light weapons. In addition, we have established with European Union partners an EU Code of Conduct on arms exports. This Code of Conduct, which is underpinned by a consultative mechanism, aims to prevent the transfer of weapons which might be used for external aggression or internal repression, including use by, or against, children. We call on all other arms-exporting countries to subscribe to the same principles.

When wars happen, the protagonists must make sure that children are properly protected. The Geneva Conventions and their Protocols, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter of Rights and Welfare of the Child set out the standards. There must be no impunity for those who ignore them. Those who target children must be brought to justice. The establishment of the International Criminal Court will be an important step towards this. We urge all States to sign and ratify the Rome Statute of the Court.

We must raise the internationally agreed minimum age of recruitment for soldiers. The current age of 15 is too low. The United Kingdom is playing an active and constructive role in negotiations on the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have made clear that we will not block any consensus reached. But we must not let that debate distract us from the concrete problem on the ground of the continuing recruitment of thousands of very young children. We are all familiar with pictures of children as young as 10 carrying Kalashnikovs in Africa. Our priority must be the ending of such recruitment and the demobilization and reintegration into society of existing child soldiers.

It is a pleasure to see the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict here today. My good friend Olara Otunnu has done much to raise the profile of issues surrounding children and armed conflict and to deal with individual country situations. We welcome and support the catalyzing work he as done so far. It is important that during the remaining period of his mandate the United Nations system and other players should work together to consider new ideas and strategies for children and armed conflict which will shape their policies in future years. We particularly welcome the Special Representative's work in this area, and have made available up to £400,000, or a little more than $600,000, to support his project for country-specific follow-up. This project should bring together all the actors in particular country situations so that they can work among themselves to identify priorities for action and develop greater coherence of approach. We hope this will produce new best practices which will be a lasting legacy from the Special Representative's mandate.

But we should not, in this debate, ignore the role of other parts of the United Nations system which have been

engaged in operational work on children for many years. Their work has helped alleviate untold suffering and has made an incalculable difference to many lives. Many parts of the United Nations system are involved, as are national Governments, regional organizations and civil society. The United Nations Children's Fund, as the main promoter within the United Nations of children's rights, does particularly valuable work. The United Kingdom is providing £9 million of funding to its work on children and armed conflict.

Children neither start wars nor perpetuate them. They should not pay the price for adults' wars. They have a right to be protected, and all of us have a duty to ensure that they are. We hope the draft resolution being negotiated in the context of this debate will make a real difference.

The President: I thank the representative of the United Kingdom for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Doutriaux (France) (*spoke in French*): After its long struggle for independence, Sir, your country is presiding over the Security Council this month and you yourself will serve as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. France welcomes this, and welcomes your country's very effective and active guidance of the Council's work during this particularly busy month of August. We are grateful to you for this.

I thank you too for convening this open debate on the question of children and armed conflict, which again demonstrates the determination of the Security Council to do all it can to protect civilian populations and to ensure respect for international law and the maintenance of peace. It is peace that is desired by the children that Mr. Otunnu has met everywhere he has gone in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas.

Today's debate provides a timely opportunity for the Council to adopt a draft resolution, a text which is most welcome and which my delegation entirely supports.

The tragic events that have been described by Mr. Otunnu and others, such as the situation of children in Sierra Leone, compel us to act to ensure respect for and the strengthening of the minimal protections that must be provided to children.

Let me emphasize a number of elements of this debate. The first is the need for truly universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and for strengthening it with respect to the age of participation in armed conflict; it is sad to note that it does not now enable us to combat the scourge under which thousands of children throughout the world suffer. We hope that the ongoing negotiations on this matter will lead in the year 2000 to the adoption of an additional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that will end the use of child soldiers and will raise the minimum age of participation in hostilities to 18.

The definition of international norms is not sufficient, of course, but it is a necessary first step. Thus, we welcome and support the action undertaken by the Special Representative, Mr. Olara Otunnu, to convince parties to a conflict to commit themselves explicitly to respecting the rights established by the conventions. Not only the United Nations system as a whole, but also States and other actors must contribute to raising awareness and to working together. At 10-years old, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a relatively recent instrument, but we must continue to advance along the path to improved protection.

In this regard, we welcome the adoption, since our debate last year on the protection of children, of the Statute of the International Criminal Court. The entry into force of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction is another positive development.

France hopes to continue to work actively to protect children. It has already done so through its commitment to providing financial support of one of Mr. Otunnu's projects. In the context of our activities in the Security Council, we shall see to it that our concern for the protection of children be duly and systematically taken into account in all of our decisions, including in the implementation of sanctions regimes.

In this regard, the draft resolution we will shortly adopt provides us with a "road map" for honouring these commitments. We must ensure their follow-up, especially when we receive reports of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians, as well as in the specific case of every operation approved by the Security Council.

Moreover, the uncontrolled and destabilizing distribution of small arms and light weapons turns children into victims and executioners alike. That is why France, along with its partners in the European Union — as was just pointed out by the representative of the United Kingdom — has undertaken joint action and

follows with interest the efforts of other countries and regional groups to control this phenomenon.

We should mobilize every means at our disposal to allow children to enjoy their right to peace. I welcome the valuable contribution of Mr. Otunnu, which he will continue to make in the context of his mission. I also welcome the tireless work in the field of the agencies and other bodies of the United Nations, in particular the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Children represent humanity's future. Protecting them is an essential objective for all of us.

The President: I thank the representative of France for his kinds words addressed to me.

Ms. Soderberg (United States of America): Let me join in welcoming you here today, Sir. On behalf of the United States, I commend your lifelong commitment to democracy and human rights. It is truly an honour to have you with us here today. Your own personal journey is a testament to those who have striven and continue to strive for liberty and justice.

The United States is pleased to support the draft resolution that we are discussing today regarding children and armed conflict. We appreciate the work of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, and his commitment to protecting all children affected by this terrible issue. He has eloquently described the horrendous impact of present-day conflicts on children, both in terms of their scale and their terrible lasting effects, which can endure for years and even generations. His impressive efforts have made great strides in protecting children at risk around the world.

We wholeheartedly agree with the point, made by Special Representative Otunnu in his last report, that when children are used as pawns in warfare, whether they are targets or perpetrators, a shadow is cast on their future and on the future of their society. We lament the deterioration in local value systems that has accompanied the increase in protracted and brutal civil conflicts. As Special Representative Otunnu has pointed out today and in the past, many regions of the world are experiencing the breakdown of traditional norms and social codes of behaviour, the casting-aside of local injunctions and taboos, and the undermining of the authority of local elders and community structures. This disintegration of local value systems results in an "ethical vacuum", as Mr. Otunnu has termed it, in which civilians and combatants are viewed without distinction as enemy targets. Children, women and the elderly — the types of people whom societies have historically acted to protect from harm — have all become fair game for the most horrendous of atrocities in the valueless climate which prevails in far too many war zones.

In examining the plight of war-affected children, it is important not only that we look at the symptoms of their plight, but that we take aim at the causes as well. The civil conflicts which put children in harm's way and which deliver so much death, homelessness, hunger, illness and suffering upon them must be resolved in order for their suffering to be abated. We in the Security Council must continue to do all we can to help maintain and, when necessary, restore international peace and security, so that fewer children and other civilians will suffer the horrors of war.

As the number of civil wars increases, local value systems and international standards and principles are being swept aside. Civilian populations are often deliberately targeted and children suffer disproportionately as their families are killed or displaced. One of the most heinous developments has been the increasing use of young children in armed conflict, in blatant violation of international law.

On 17 June, the International Labour Organization unanimously adopted Convention Number 182, the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. On that occasion, President Clinton stated unequivocally: "We will not tolerate children being forcibly recruited to serve in armed conflicts." He added his strong support for universal ratification of the Convention and has submitted the Convention to the United States Senate for advice and consent to ratification.

Unfortunately, the development of lighter, more sophisticated weapons has made it easier to send both boys and girls into combat. Because of their size, these children are forced to work as scouts, spies, messengers and decoys. They are often drugged and face other real tragedies and human rights abuses. Many are wounded in both mind and body. Even if they survive their ordeal, they are often deprived of proper care and assistance, both during and after the conflict. All have suffered a

severe disruption of their education and preparation for their lives as adults.

We believe that it is time to exert pressure to implement the many existing norms to prevent the further abuse and brutalization of children. We should not let our attention be distracted by debates on the margin of the problem, but rather focus on where the real abuses are: with children even younger than 15 whose lives are totally distorted by their recruitment into armed conflict and brutality, becoming both perpetrators and victims.

The United States places the highest priority on assisting young children throughout the world who are forced against their will, often kidnapped at gunpoint, to take up arms in support of militias and paramilitary groups engaged in hostilities. The United States is working closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) with respect to programmes to rehabilitate children through counselling, reconciliation, education and vocational training, in the hope that they will readjust and be reintegrated into civilian society.

Since 1989, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided over $30 million in support of activities — including demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration — that respond to the needs of children, including child soldiers, affected by armed conflict in such areas as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka.

In 1998, the United States contributed over $7 million to activities for refugee children, including over $4 million for UNHCR's programmes for children at risk, which highlight those children affected by armed conflict, including child soldiers, and over $2 million for the Liberian Children's Initiative.

The Northern Uganda Initiative, announced by the First Lady during a March 1998 visit to that country, is a project to provide targeted assistance where it is most needed. In this connection, we strongly condemn the reprehensible acts of the Lord's Resistance Army.

In Sierra Leone, we have contributed to UNICEF for assistance to war-affected children, including documentation and tracing of unaccompanied children and reunification with their families, demobilization, and community reintegration of former child soldiers.

The United States strenuously condemns the use of children in armed conflict in a manner that violates international law, many examples of which we have heard about this morning. We must also condemn the brutal practice of the amputation of limbs in Sierra Leone. Victims include citizens of all ages, including a 2-year-old girl I saw last month in Freetown. Such inhumanity demands a strong international response.

Demobilizing children involved in armed conflicts after peace is attained and reintegrating them into society is a complex process. Many emerge knowing no way of life beyond war. The United States works closely with United Nations organizations, international and non-governmental organizations, and others in support of efforts to rehabilitate children in armed conflict.

Because of the particular vulnerability of refugee and internally displaced children, the United States is working with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to better address the special protection and assistance needs of refugee children. We endeavour to strengthen the capacity of local organizations so that they may continue working with children after the assistance ends. For the most part, children who fought in conflicts are not singled out to receive help, but are part of a larger programme that assists children affected by war.

Approximately 5,000 children have received assistance, either directly or indirectly, from programmes that we have funded in Angola, Liberia, northern Uganda and Sierra Leone. These programmes provide counselling not only for the children to deal with their experiences, but also for their families and communities to facilitate the acceptance of their return home. In the event that children who fought in armed conflicts cannot return to their villages, alternative measures such as relocating them to other villages or placing them in group homes or with substitute families must be pursued. Educational and vocational training are also a means of preparing children affected by wars to lead constructive lives.

We place the highest priority on assisting children throughout the world and will continue to work with Governments, United Nations agencies, international and non-governmental agencies and other partners who have specific responsibility and expertise to address the difficult and tragic problem of the exploitation of children as soldiers. The necessity of improving the situation of all children affected by armed conflict is of the utmost importance to the United States, and that is why we hope

we will be able to adopt this draft resolution later today. It is an important one that follows on the progress made with the adoption of the ILO Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, and will provide momentum for the continued work later this year on the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Today's children are tomorrow's hope. We must all work to ensure that hope is not extinguished by the blight of armed conflict.

The President: I thank the representative of the United States for the kind words she addressed to me.

Mr. Türk (Slovenia): We would like to express our appreciation to the delegation of Namibia for preparing this open debate on the situation of children and armed conflict. We are particularly pleased that this debate is taking place under the presidency of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia. We would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Olara Otunnu, for his statement. He again presented us, in most compelling terms, with the tragic consequences of armed conflicts for children. More than a year has elapsed since the Security Council held its first open debate and issued its first presidential statement on the subject. It is therefore timely for the Council to take stock of developments and strengthen its efforts to assist and protect children in armed conflict.

The plight and the number of children affected by armed conflict are appalling. As a result of the changing nature of contemporary conflicts and the fact that they often take place over extremely protracted periods of time, the consequences are devastating for children. Millions are still victims of wars and often their principal targets: killed, brutalized, permanently disabled, sexually abused, traumatized, separated from their families and forcibly displaced from their homes. And, more ironically, children have also become instruments of war, recruited or kidnapped to become child soldiers and to participate in hostilities. Entire generations are being victimized and their prospects for a normal life destroyed.

The work of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, is extremely pertinent both for awareness-raising and for the identification and implementation of viable strategies to effectively address the victimization of children in armed conflict. We strongly support the concrete initiatives proposed and the field missions undertaken by the Special Representative to assess the plight of children in conflict situations and to mitigate the suffering of children affected by war, including in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kosovo and Afghanistan. We are heartened by the results achieved in obtaining commitments from the conflicting parties to stop the recruitment and enlistment as soldiers of children under the agreed age limit and to allow humanitarian ceasefires. It is of paramount importance to follow up on these activities and to ensure that the parties honour their commitments.

The special needs of children should be recognized in peace agreements, including through comprehensive demobilization and rehabilitation programmes specifically designed for child soldiers. Given the dramatic scale of the plight of children in Sierra Leone, we are particularly pleased that the Peace Agreement in that country recognized children's entitlement to special care and to protection of their inherent right to life, survival and development, and recognized also the need for long-term rehabilitation of child combatants. This should be one of the important priorities in the process of the implementation of peace.

The efforts of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict have to be closely coordinated with the work of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other United Nations organs, agencies and organizations which have the necessary expertise, resources and operational capacities on the ground. Their cooperation is crucial to achieve results and truly ameliorate the situation of children affected by armed conflict. Their efforts deserve the recognition and full support of the Security Council, both for their inherent humanitarian value and for their contribution to international endeavours for peace and security.

The Council must pay special attention to children in its decision-making and in mandating peacemaking, peacekeeping or peace-building operations. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration represent a standard aspect of many situations dealt with by the Security Council, and the special needs of child soldiers have to be duly taken into account on such occasions. In his reports to the Security Council the Secretary- General should be encouraged to include recommendations in that regard. The same is true in the case of demining. Just as important, although perhaps less obviously pertinent to the work of the Council, is the question of preventing the

recruitment of children as soldiers. If the Security Council proves effective in addressing specific situations, it will also help the larger cause of curtailing the practice of the exploitation of children as soldiers.

In presidential statement S/PRST/1998/18 of 29 June 1998, the Security Council expressed its readiness also to consider "means to assist" and "appropriate responses" when sites that usually have a significant presence of children are specifically targeted. This is an important commitment by the Security Council that needs to be emphasized once again. The Special Representative should be encouraged to inform the Security Council of situations in which particular action of the Security Council might be required. We would like to recall in this context the provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court that designate intentionally directing attacks against such buildings as a war crime.

The Council must also extend its full support to deployment of human rights field monitors and to the efforts of the Secretary-General to ensure that the personnel involved in United Nations-mandated operations will receive special training on the protection, rights and welfare of children. We support the efforts to review and strengthen arrangements and standards for the conduct of peacekeeping personnel in that regard. We recognize the importance of UNICEF's training package on gender and child rights protection in complex emergencies, which is already being used by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and several national peacekeeping training institutes. We welcome the Secretary-General's bulletin on the observance by United Nations forces of international humanitarian law, which also sets out the obligation for special protection for children, including against any form of indecent assault.

It is worth repeating what the Special Representative, Mr. Otunnu, has stressed on a number of previous occasions: children simply have no role in warfare. Slovenia fully supports the efforts to raise the minimum age limit for recruitment and the participation of children in hostilities to 18 years through the adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We welcome the provisions regarding child soldiers in the recently adopted International Labour Organization Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

The international community is facing a perplexing situation today. We have an impressive body of international humanitarian and human rights law that sets standards for conduct in conflict situations. Yet there is an unacceptably wide and growing gap between the existing norms and the situation on the ground, where these norms are flagrantly violated by belligerent parties. It is clearly primarily the responsibility of States to put an end to impunity and to ensure that those responsible for violations of these norms are brought to justice. States must act individually through their national systems of justice, and also collectively, to achieve this goal through an effective international justice system.

The adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court has manifold implications for children affected by armed conflicts. It designates as a war crime the practice of conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 or using them to participate actively in hostilities in both international and non-international armed conflicts. It furthermore recognizes as war crimes and crimes against humanity such crimes as rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence, and these provisions are of great significance particularly in the light of the situation of girls in armed conflicts. It is our hope that the Statute will enter into force as soon as possible.

The situation of children affected by armed conflict has many important aspects and we realize that it would be too ambitious to address all of them extensively in our statement today. Let me conclude by saying that we are pleased to see that the Security Council is going to adopt a draft resolution on children and armed conflict for the very first time, and also that it is increasingly paying attention to the problem of children and armed conflict when discussing different items on its agenda. The recent adoption of the resolution on Sierra Leone, which for the first time specifically addresses the situation of children affected by armed conflict, is a case in point. We would encourage a continuous and meaningful dialogue with the Special Representative in situations before the Council, and we look forward to the report of the Secretary-General and his recommendations for concrete measures on the protection and welfare of war-affected children.

Slovenia fully supports the preparation of today's draft resolution and hopes that it will be adopted.

The President: I thank the representative of Slovenia for his kind words addressed to me.

Mr. Shen Guofang (China)(*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. President, like other delegations, the Chinese delegation warmly welcomes you as you preside over this important meeting of the Council today. We express our appreciation for the efforts made by the Namibian delegation for arranging this open debate. The Chinese delegation would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Otunnu, for his briefing to the Council on the question of children and armed conflict.

The question of children and armed conflict has always been a concern of various countries and relevant United Nations agencies. At present, armed conflicts exist in many parts of the world, affecting not only international peace and security, but also causing great harm to the countries and peoples concerned. As one of the most vulnerable social groups, children are the hardest hit in armed conflict. Some of them have become homeless refugees, wandering in the streets. Some have been recruited as child soldiers, living from day to day. Not only can they not lead a normal life and receive the education they deserve in situations of armed conflict, but they are also constantly exposed to the danger of death. Their psychological and physical health are greatly impaired.

Children are the future of the world. However, the predicament of children in situations of armed conflict, with all its implications, has received widespread attention among the international community. The fundamental approach to protecting children in armed conflict is to effectively prevent, stop and eliminate armed conflicts. However, it is very regrettable that we have not been able to achieve that. In this regard, we believe the United Nations should provide greater input. Under such circumstances, we should also adopt measures and urge the parties to conflicts to expeditiously end conflicts through peaceful means and demand that the parties abide by various international laws, including international humanitarian laws. Various types of violence committed against children in armed conflict should be prevented and prohibited, and the necessary protection and assistance should be provided to them so that they can resume their normal life and education as soon as possible.

We call upon the international community, relevant international organizations and relevant United Nations agencies in particular to further strengthen their coordination and cooperation and to join hands in a greater effort to solve the problem of children and armed conflict.

We would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Mr. Otunnu for his active efforts over the years in seeking a solution to the problem of children and armed conflict. China would like to continue its support for his work.

China has always attached great importance to the question of the protection of children and has always actively taken part in deliberations on this issue, both in the General Assembly and in other agencies. We believe that the question of the protection of children involves many aspects and is highly technical in nature. Therefore, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council are appropriate forums where more comprehensive, adequate and in-depth deliberations can be conducted.

Recently, the Security Council has time and again taken up the issue of humanitarian situations in regions of conflicts. Many members have emphasized that, as the main organ bearing primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, the Security Council should focus more of its attention on eliminating the root causes of humanitarian crises. We fully concur with this opinion. On the basis of that understanding, we believe that while deliberating on the issue of children and armed conflict, the Security Council should also hold discussions on issues such as how to end conflicts and defuse crises that are at the root of this problem. It should also propose practical and effective measures and recommend an effective monitoring mechanism. The Security Council should be capable of making these contributions on the issue of children and armed conflict.

The President: I thank the representative of China for his kind words addressed to my country.

Mr. Mohammad Kamal (Malaysia): Mr. President, like those who have spoken before me, my delegation would also like to warmly welcome you to New York and to say how pleased we are to see you preside over this important meeting. Like our British colleague, I, too, have some personal affiliation with Namibia which I will always cherish. During the transitional period prior to independence, I had the rare opportunity to visit and stay in your beautiful country for three weeks meeting its leaders, including His Excellency the President of Namibia and you, Sir, and the warm people of Namibia as part of the Commonwealth Observer Group to ensure free and fair elections in your country. During that crucial period, too, Malaysia was one of the three largest contingents that participated in the United Nations

Transition Assistance Group in Namibia and which was located in Ovamboland.

Above all, it was under the presidency of Malaysia in the Security Council in this Chamber that the enabling resolution 435 (1978) was adopted.

My delegation wishes to congratulate you for the initiative you have taken to hold an open meeting of the Council on a subject which is of great concern to the international community. We also wish to extend our sincere appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, for his very lucid and comprehensive statement on the subject.

This is the second time in fourteen months that the Council is holding an open debate on the item "Children and armed conflict", a clear reflection of the Council's serious and continuing concern on the matter. Following the Council's first debate in June last year, it issued a presidential statement which, *inter alia*, condemned the targeting of children, including their humiliation, brutalization, sexual abuse, abduction and forced displacement and recruitment as soldiers. These are immoral acts which flagrantly violate the principles of international law and international humanitarian laws and instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The 1996 independent report entitled "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children" provided the first, most comprehensive and compelling assessment of the multiple ways in which children are abused and brutalized in the context of armed conflict. The report, *inter alia*, underscored the urgent need for a public advocate and moral voice on behalf of children whose rights and welfare have been and are being violated in situations of armed conflict in a number of countries. Since then, the United Nations has undertaken several actions and programmes to address this phenomenon. In this regard, the appointment of Mr. Otunnu as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict was a welcome and timely move in the right direction to address this issue. My delegation commends the Special Representative for the outstanding manner with which he carried out his mandate, particularly in sensitizing the international community on the gravity of the matter and on the need for concrete measures to stop these practices.

The Special Representative, in his report of 21 October 1998, highlighted that not only millions of children are still victims of war but far too often they are its principal targets, and even its instruments. It is very alarming and disturbing to know that today, according to the United Nations Children's Fund, there are 300,000 children under the age of 18 who are serving as regular soldiers, guerilla fighters, spies, cooks, sexual slaves and even suicide commandos, in a number of the ongoing conflicts throughout the world. Over the last decade alone, these wars have taken a heavy toll on children. They have claimed the lives of more than two million of them, caused six million to be maimed or permanently disabled, left one million orphaned and ten million psychologically traumatized and have resulted in children accounting for half the world's 24 million refugees.

In the light of these dismal and dismaying statistics, the question that begs to be asked is: what is the international community doing to protect these innocent and hapless children? Is it doing enough to ensure the promotion of the rights and protection of children victimized by armed conflict? As my delegation stated on an earlier occasion, the issue of children in armed conflict deserved the serious attention of the international community in its own right. The Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has identified selected measures to alleviate the sufferings of children caught in armed conflict. He has rightly pointed out that a strong political will is necessary to translate existing standards and commitments into actions to make substantive progress in the protection of these children. It is imperative that the United Nations, through the Security Council, call on States involved in armed conflicts to protect children, using the measures available to it.

My delegation also strongly supports the Special Representative's views that the problem of children in armed conflict must be tackled in a comprehensive manner: that is, to provide protection for them during the armed conflict and to assist in their recuperation and reintegration in post-conflict situations, but, more importantly, to try to prevent the onset of conflict in the first place. Believing in the adage that "prevention is better than cure", my delegation endorses the Special Representative's call for international and national actors to take actions to prevent conflicts rather than to allow inequities and marginalization to escalate into armed conflicts. We should not be content to play a fireman's role of merely putting out fires. A "band-aid" solution will not resolve the conflict nor provide a lasting and permanent peace. The measures outlined by the Special Representative deserve the strong support of the international community and the Council.

My delegation wishes to reiterate that those who are guilty of acts of violence against children during armed conflicts should be punished with the severity they deserve. We are gratified that among such punitive measures, the conscripting or enlisting of children under the age of 15 into armed forces or of using them to participate in hostilities, and the targeting of schools have now been made war crimes under the statute of the International Criminal Court. The Security Council, whenever it adopts measures under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations in dealing with armed conflicts, must give due consideration to their impact on children in order to consider appropriate humanitarian exemptions.

Children are the hope of the future. Indeed, they are the future of every society and of civilization itself. Scarred and abused children may well grow up to be scarred and abusive adults who will perpetrate and perpetuate the scarring and the abusing. Children who grow up in a culture of violence are unlikely to have the skills and knowledge to inculcate a culture of peace. They are the least responsible for conflicts, yet the most vulnerable and hapless victims. There is even today, a continuing enlistment and deployment of children as soldiers; some properly recruited, others kidnapped or coerced into service. Children should have no role whatsoever in warfare. Yet studies have shown that children participate actively in most of today's armed conflicts, some driven by ideology but most of them exploited because they come from poor and disadvantaged communities. Such children must be reintegrated into post-civil-war society. All parties should take part in the rehabilitation of child soldiers, especially young girls traumatized by their wartime experiences.

My delegation supports the enhanced focus of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on child refugees to promote the protection of refugees and internally displaced children. We call on all parties, both Governments and rebels, to end the use of child soldiers, and we urge them to stop recruiting children, demobilize those already recruited and seek ways to reintegrate demobilized child soldiers into society. All programmes pertaining to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants should include children as an integral component of the effort. My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to commend the tireless efforts of all international agencies involved in the protection of children affected by armed conflict, particularly the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR.

As a signatory to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Malaysia calls on the few remaining countries that have not signed or ratified this Convention to do so. We are also actively considering the possibility of acceding to the International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, as we are of the view that child soldiering is one of the worst forms of child labour. Malaysia strongly supports the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child which calls for a minimum age of 18 for peacekeepers.

We are gratified to note that the Special Representative has reported that several countries and rebel factions currently embroiled in armed conflict and bloodshed pledged not to recruit child soldiers. We are equally gratified that the recently concluded Lomé Peace Agreement for Sierra Leone contained provisions that guarantee special care and protection for children and for their inherent rights to life, survival and development, in accordance with international conventions. Wherever relevant, all peace agreements must include comprehensive demobilization programmes for child soldiers, family tracing and reunification and rehabilitation, as well as provisions for meeting the special educational and vocational needs of former child soldiers.

My delegation supports the draft resolution on children and armed conflict that will be tabled in the Council later on. We believe that the adoption of this draft resolution by the Council would constitute a concrete and timely measure to address this important issue with a view to halting this cruel and inhumane practice so that future generations of children in situations of armed conflict will be spared the fates of the current generation. We believe the draft resolution contains all the necessary elements for addressing the issue in a comprehensive fashion, and we recommend that it be adopted by the Council.

The President: I thank the representative of Malaysia for his kind words addressed to my country and myself.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to express our great satisfaction at the fact that today's meeting of the Security Council is taking place under your presidency. Your personal participation underscores the significance that your

country and the Security Council as a whole attach to the problems of the protection of children in armed conflicts.

A little more than a year has passed since the previous meeting of the Security Council on the problem of children in armed conflicts. Our returning to this most tragic subject shows that children suffering from wars are not being overlooked by the Council, above all in the context of fulfilling its major obligation under the Charter: to maintain international peace and security.

It is significant that all members of the Security Council are united in their deep concern regarding the misfortunes suffered by the littler inhabitants of our world. Such unanimity shows that humanity is making its way towards the dawning of the next millennium with a clear desire to put into practice, for current and future generations, the lofty humanitarian ideals and to pay attention to individuals, their problems and sufferings, their rights and freedoms.

In the very first lines of the United Nations Charter we find proclaimed a lofty goal: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which to this very day continues to kill and maim our children. War deprives children of what is most valuable and dear to them in life: parents, health, childhood, homeland and life itself. The figures we have heard today tell us how far we remain from this noble goal enshrined in the Charter.

In this connection, we have deep respect for the tireless work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, who has done a great deal to combat this problem. The views he expressed today and his recommendations as to what the international community might do to relieve the sufferings of children and prohibit their participation in conflicts are deserving of the greatest consideration by the relevant United Nations bodies.

It should be pointed out that some progress has been made in our struggle to ensure children's right to a peaceful life. The Governments of virtually all the world's countries have fully recognized their responsibility to children and have become parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which as a result is the most universal international treaty. Throughout the world there has arisen a powerful movement in support of the effective banning of the use of child soldiers.

Russia fully supports the recommendations adopted in the fall of 1998 at the nineteenth session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, at which the Committee expressed the hope for the early adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a protocol that concerns children in armed conflicts. We welcome the intention of the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights to conclude its work on this draft document by the year 2000.

On 20 November of this year we will observe the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The inclusion of this item on the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly gives us a good opportunity to have an in-depth discussion of a whole range of problems pertaining to the younger generation, first and foremost the issue of how to remove children from the context of armed conflicts.

Along with this, both within the United Nations and outside of it, we see a broad range of authoritative bodies and institutions that are dealing competently with the problems faced by children in emergency situations. These organs include the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights and its special mechanisms, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Children's Fund. The International Committee of the Red Cross also has accumulated solid resources and a wealth of experience in working in the area of international humanitarian law which has special provisions for the protection of children in armed conflicts and for providing them assistance.

The Security Council is considering these issues first and foremost in the context of specific volatile situations for which it must find settlements. Any hot spot inevitably involves tragedy for children, and, unfortunately, one need not look far for examples. Last week, the Secretary-General expressed concern at the involvement in the hostilities in Afghanistan of participants as young as 14 years of age. The need to coordinate the achievement of peace with the establishment of priorities for resolving the problems of children scarred by war was reflected in the Lomé Peace Agreement for Sierra Leone. In its recent resolution on Sierra Leone, the Security Council welcomed the Peace Agreement and the commitment by the Government of Sierra Leone to cooperate with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. This is a very important new development.

In its efforts to settle armed conflicts and to prevent new ones, the world community should do its utmost to lessen their harmful effect on children, both those who accidentally find themselves at the epicentre of hostilities and underage soldiers. They all require assistance, first and foremost, for reintegration into society, but that is obviously not enough. It is time to address preventing the involvement of children in hostilities. Measures to that end could include, at the national level, the formulation and implementation of programmes to inculcate children with the spirit of peace; enabling children to obtain a good education and to find civilian employment; and disseminating information about international legal norms governing the rights of the child. At the international level, they could include efforts to provide early warning about conflicts; the use of preventive diplomacy; stricter controls on illegal trafficking in small arms and light weapons; and limiting arms shipments to areas of conflict.

The inauguration of the work of the International Criminal Court should provide a serious deterrent to the use of children in armed conflict. The subject of children and armed conflict should also be highlighted during the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, scheduled to take place at Geneva in November 1999.

My country was among the first to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Legal and practical guarantees of the rights of the child form a basic element of Russian policy in the sphere of child protection, which is conducted in the context of a single national plan of action for children. Here, priority attention is being given to the problems of children in dire circumstances as well as to their physical and psychological rehabilitation.

The national efforts of Russia and of its partners in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) also have regional ramifications. One result of the CIS review of the problems of children, including those suffering in armed conflicts, was the adoption at the twelfth plenary meeting of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of States Which Are Participants in the Commonwealth of Independent States, held in December 1998, of a decree on the protection of children in CIS States.

I wish in conclusion to express the hope that today's wide-ranging discussion and any decision that the Security Council may adopt at its conclusion will give needed impetus to international cooperation in protecting the younger generation from the violence of armed conflict.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Dangue Réwaka (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I welcome you here today, and thank you and your delegation for having taken the welcome initiative to organize this debate on children and armed conflict.

The informative statement of Ambassador Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, amply described the nature and the magnitude of the further efforts that the United Nations and particularly the Security Council must make to better guarantee the defence and protection of children in times of armed conflict. I shall not enumerate the abuses and other mistreatment of children in armed conflict, because previous speakers, in particular Ambassador Otunnu, have spoken eloquently of those problems. For our part, we wish to stress what the United Nations must continue to do to put a lasting end to all the diverse abuses to which children fall victim during conflicts.

In June 1998 the Council stated its firm determination, in full harmony with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and with the relevant United Nations programmes, funds and bodies, to support efforts to secure a commitment that there will be an end to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts; to give particular attention to the disarmament and demobilization of child soldiers and to the reintegration into society of children maimed or traumatized as a result of armed conflict; and to support and promote programmes, focused on children, for mine-clearance and for teaching the dangers of mines, and programmes for the re-education and rehabilitation of children. That commitment by the Council will be reflected today in the adoption of a draft resolution on this item.

States, especially those involved in armed conflicts, must give high priority to the effective implementation of existing international instruments, including the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, of 1989. In that context, we thank Ambassador Olara Otunnu for drawing the Council's attention to violations of those international norms on the protection of children, and for making the

necessary recommendations. We are gratified by his commitment, and we assure him of our complete support.

In our view, a lasting solution to the problems of children in armed conflict must include both the prevention and settlement of armed conflicts and the improvement of economic and social conditions in the countries in which those children live.

The President: I thank the representative of Gabon for his kind words addressed to me.

Mr. Fonseca (Brazil): I should like to join my colleagues in welcoming you, Sir, and to say that we are honoured by your presence here today. Indeed, your presence here is inspiring because your life is an example in the struggle for the values of human rights and democracy. I also wish to congratulate you and Ambassador Andjaba on the timely initiative of holding this meeting, which reflects the devotion of Namibia to creating a more just and more humane international order.

The statement made on 29 June last year by the President of the Security Council reflected a wide consensus on the need to address the plight of children affected by armed conflicts. This consensus made it possible to take a step further this year through the negotiation of a draft resolution on the matter. It is important to stress that these are groundbreaking developments that deserve praise.

The paradox is that the positive trend represented by the readiness of the Security Council to keep on its agenda the issue of children and armed conflict is a direct result of the deteriorating situation on the ground. Unfortunately, our efforts still fall short of what is needed to end the grievous suffering of children affected by armed conflicts.

We are grateful to Mr. Otunnu for his devotion to the cause of children and for his personal contribution to the significant progress that has been achieved in safeguarding their rights in areas of conflict. His reports paint a dire picture of the situation on the ground and emphasize the need for a broad-based approach to this issue. I very strongly support his views on the need for an endeavour of application to be launched so as to ensure that international norms and values are turned into practice.

The Security Council must play its part in a much broader strategy to address the various dimensions of this urgent and dramatic problem. First of all, in dealing with situations of armed conflict, the Council should not lose sight of the special humanitarian needs of children. It is of paramount importance that the Security Council take into account the effects on the welfare of children of measures adopted under Article 41 of the United Nations Charter. Therefore, humanitarian exemptions may have to be considered as appropriate.

Children are particularly vulnerable to gross violations of humanitarian law and constitute an easy target for all sorts of abuses. When discharging its functions in matters related to international security, the Council should bear in mind the imperative of bringing to an end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts in violation of international law.

We are aware of the importance of the four policy-related keywords concerning the use of children in armed conflicts: disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration. However, let us not forget those who are maimed, psychologically traumatized and orphaned regardless of their direct involvement in belligerence. No doubt, a greater degree of system-wide coordination within the United Nations is also essential in this regard.

The Security Council must work in close coordination with the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, given their pivotal role in assuring appropriate assistance to children in need, especially in the context of post-conflict peacebuilding. We should also acknowledge the valuable work carried out by other United Nations agencies, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Most of this work is undertaken under extremely difficult circumstances and within limited budgets.

I believe that the assistance provided by humanitarian workers sets an example for us all. Let us strive to assure that their abnegation serves to inspire our efforts at the national and international levels. Brazil will continue to lend its firm support to the development of a coherent strategy to meet the special needs of children affected by armed conflicts.

We look forward to the completion of the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts aimed at raising the minimum level of protection provided for in that Convention. In this connection, we have expressed on several occasions our concern at the use of landmines, which account for a great deal of

deaths and casualties among children. Along with the ban of landmines, it is necessary to set in motion comprehensive programmes of mine clearance and mine awareness.

Also in the field of disarmament, we should pay attention to the flow of small arms and light weapons as well. The attention that should be drawn to such kinds of weapons has to do not only with their deadly potential, which has already proven to be enormous, but also with the fact they are easily carried by child soldiers.

Political will and decisive action are required if we are to successfully prevent the children of the next generations from being stolen and their future ravaged by warfare. It is Brazil's hope that our efforts, on all the fronts I have just mentioned, shall be commensurate with the magnitude of the challenges before us. In this endeavour to protect our children from armed conflicts, it is the human condition itself that is at stake. Let us strive to ensure that children all over the world are the bearers of hope and confidence in a better future for all, and not victims of the perversity that humans are often capable of.

The President: I thank the representative of Brazil for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a very great privilege for my delegation to speak in this important debate under your leadership, Sir. Your country is one of the most important in this Organization and we feel honoured to have shared in the past the objectives of freedom and equality for which you risked your life and well-being. We also feel honoured to share now the objectives of democracy, good governance and human rights.

These discussions are in part directly related to the entirety of this all-important subject. In this respect, I wish to thank Ambassador Olara Otunnu for his comments and to acknowledge his steadfast efforts and convictions on this matter. We congratulate the Secretary-General on having appointed him.

This is the second time that the Council has held a meeting on the question of children and armed conflict. That fact demonstrates the Council's commitment to a matter that is of increasing concern to the international community. Let us recall that, on 29 June 1998, we adopted a presidential statement and that the Council is currently preparing to adopt a draft resolution.

It is crucial to establish international norms aimed at halting the barbaric and illegal practice of bringing children to the battlefield. The obligations set out in the Geneva Conventions and in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which are mentioned in the draft resolution under consideration, are essential provisions, compliance with which must be insisted upon. The current debate and the draft resolution to be adopted by the Council join the ranks of those mechanisms. The International Criminal Court is a formidable tool for eradicating these types of actions, which its Statute considers to be war crimes. We urge States to accede to that international instrument as soon as possible.

Argentina believes that the minimum age for recruitment and participation in conflicts must be 18 years. Historically we have respected that minimum age in our own domestic provisions. In addition, some years ago we abolished mandatory military service, making it strictly voluntary. It is our hope that this trend will be further strengthened, and we are gratified that other countries are doing the same. We also support the policy adopted almost a year ago by the Secretary-General on age limits for peacekeeping forces and civilian police.

It is necessary to adopt as soon as possible an additional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Security Council should encourage this process. States and regional organizations also must be invited to join this effort.

Furthermore, it is essential to provide better training for the troops that form part of peacekeeping missions. That training should range from the disarmament stages up through the demobilization and rehabilitation of children, and should include the identification of all reasonable ways of avoiding their participation in the militia and in armed conflicts. As the United Nations Children's Fund advocates, prompt return to school is a viable alternative. Any other solution would be chancy.

In the same context, we have maintained that there should be programmes to compensate, rehabilitate and provide special educational privileges for children and young people who have been mutilated as a result of armed conflicts. The leaders of the future must come from these groups, who better than anyone else understand the horrors and the injustice of war.

We must not forget that in order to register lasting achievements in this sensitive area, two aspects need to be borne in mind. The first is education, which makes it

possible for tolerance to take root in the human mind. The second is the effective implementation of international instruments that contribute to putting an end to the impunity enjoyed by those who commit these crimes.

It is our understanding that the Security Council must henceforth make every possible effort to promote the protection, well-being and rights of children whenever actions are taking to promote international peace and security. This could be achieved, for example, by ensuring that peace agreements contain explicit provisions in this respect.

As we indicated last year in the Council, account must also be taken of the fact that children remain at risk in those post-conflict situations in which sanctions are imposed that deprive the population of basic necessities. We must improve the design of sanctions so that they do not have an impact on innocent civilians and on children in particular.

We must also encourage the continued consideration of this question in the Security Council. This highly appropriate initiative taken by the delegation of Namibia is aimed at putting an end to a very harmful practice that hinders prospects of national reconciliation, as it affects generations of young people who for many years will bear the burden of their traumatic experiences. The Council must contribute, within its competence, to putting an end to this unacceptable reality.

The President: I thank the representative of Argentina for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Sir, my delegation is very pleased at the fact that this meeting of the Security Council is being held under your presidency. My delegation would like to express to the delegation of Namibia its thanks and appreciation for its initiative to hold this meeting on one of the items on the Council's agenda, "Children and armed conflict".

This initiative is clear evidence that the international community, represented in the Security Council, is determined to eliminate this dangerous phenomenon and to uproot this evil, which could destroy future generations through teaching children to use weapons or through the abuse of those who do not carry weapons, and by denying them their right to enjoy their childhood and live in a quiet, suitable environment that would ensure them a bright future based on education so that they can be useful to society instead of carrying weapons.

I should like also to express my thanks and appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Olara Otunnu, for his exhaustive report and for his strenuous efforts in this field, as well as to the staff of the United Nations Children's Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the other specialized United Nations agencies for their efforts to provide the best standard of living for all the children of the world in general and for children affected by armed conflict in particular.

The special impact of armed conflicts on children is an old phenomenon. It used to be considered one of the many negative side-effects of armed conflicts. Unfortunately, these side-effects have taken a dangerous turn and acquired threatening new aspects, forcing the international community to sound the alarm. Indeed, more than 300,000 children in 32 countries are involved in armed conflict. Among those countries, there are 24 in which the children concerned are under 15 years of age. Millions of children are affected by these conflicts, and this constitutes a further burden to the international community, particularly as it prepares to enter the twenty-first century. Many of the children affected by armed conflict live in terrible conditions and lack food and education.

The tragedy of children affected by armed conflict, whether they are soldiers participating in a conflict, refugees or displaced children, is considered a black stain on the world's conscience. The international community is therefore called upon to make the efforts necessary to ensure that the parties to the conflict should respect and abide by international laws and norms, particularly the 1949 Geneva Convention, the 1977 additional protocols and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is necessary to bring to justice to those responsible for child recruitment during armed conflict and to consider them war criminals, as we deal with war criminals responsible for acts of genocide. The recruitment of children and their encouragement to carry weapons and to participate in war has psychological consequences that are difficult to remove once they are adults, particularly when they have been carrying weapons since childhood. Humanitarian and relief agencies should pay more attention to the refugee and displaced children affected by armed conflicts all over the world.

My delegation supports the draft resolution submitted to the Council today and is going to vote in favour of this draft resolution.

The President: I thank the representative of Bahrain for his kind words addressed to me.

Mr. Jagne (Gambia): Mr. President, we are honoured and pleased to have you with us today. I would like to thank you, on behalf of my delegation, for organizing this open meeting on a subject to which we all attach a great deal of importance. Many thanks also to Mr. Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for his thought-provoking briefing. We also commend him for the energy and enthusiasm that he has continued to demonstrate in his advocacy to raise international public awareness of a problem that deserves the undivided attention of all of us.

Now that we know what the problems are, the next step is to move from the realm of rhetoric to the domain of deeds. The Special Representative has outlined a series of selected measures geared towards the alleviation of the suffering of children. My delegation is of the firm view that the Council should draw inspiration from these measures to formulate a programme of action. In this way, we are confident that the matter will be dealt with effectively and efficiently to produce the desired results. The first step in this direction is to keep the question of children and armed conflict on top of the agenda of the Security Council by including it in reports to the Council on peacemaking, peace-building and peacekeeping operations.

It is distressful to learn that in most recent conflicts, civilians, in particular children, have suffered greatly and that 90 per cent of the casualties of today's conflicts are civilians, of which the vast majority are women and children. The magnitude of the problem is overwhelming. We have been told that from the mid-1980's to the mid-1990's, 2 million children were killed, 1 million orphaned, 6 million seriously injured or permanently disabled, 2 million made homeless and 10 million left with serious psychological trauma.

In many conflicts, the lofty values regarding the protection of children seem to be forgotten completely. Children have been deliberately or indiscriminately targeted. Many of them have been conscripted as soldiers, sometimes at gunpoint. Not even young girls are spared. The plight of young girls is particularly worrisome. In many instances, they have been subjected to rape and other sexual and physical violence. The use of children as instruments of war is now commonplace in many conflict situations.

Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, those who are able to escape the horrors of conflict situations are either internally displaced or go elsewhere as refugees, or are separated from their families.

The situation is sometimes further exacerbated by the exposure of children to landmines and small arms. Notwithstanding the many regimes of international humanitarian and human rights instruments, violence against civilians, in particular children, goes on with indescribable impunity. This signals a complete breakdown of value systems and an utter disregard for values governing the conduct of war.

Concerted international effort is necessary to address seriously this deplorable state of affairs. We must not relent in our collective endeavour to stamp out the systematic targeting of children in situations of armed conflict. As a first step, the international community should ensure that there is respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. The ratification of the Statute of the International Criminal Court and International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 of 1999, concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour would constitute steps in the right direction.

Grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law often occur in communities which are cut off from the outside world. The presence of the international community in such places would be vital for the purpose of producing witnesses to such violations. It is therefore important that the international community gain access to places engulfed in armed conflict.

While not trying to find a justification for the violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, it is clear that in many conflict situations, many belligerents do not know the rules governing armed conflict. It is therefore important that the attention of warring parties be continuously drawn to international standards governing armed conflict and their obligations to observe them. As the French saying goes: *Nul ne censer ignorer la loi*.

This is why we support the advocacy role being played by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and encourage him and others concerned to continue to play this most vital role. Prominent in this advocacy work is the concept of children as zones of peace. We must also insist that places that usually have a significant presence of children

be treated as battle-free zones. In the same vein, it is important to obtain humanitarian ceasefires or days of tranquillity for the purposes of delivering humanitarian aid or carrying out vaccination campaigns to inoculate children. The international community should, whenever appropriate, seek to obtain the commitment of belligerents to such causes.

There are many more measures the international community may take to alleviate the plight of children caught up in armed conflict. The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict is showing the way forward.

In many post-conflict situations, the special needs of children affected by conflict are not addressed. Children are the future of any nation. Their concerns and needs should therefore be included in any post-conflict rehabilitation process at an early stage. In this regard, the example of Sierra Leone is worthy of note.

We note with satisfaction that the Security Council continues to treat this issue with all the seriousness that it deserves. There is a clear commitment in the Council to continue to take the necessary steps to promote the protection of civilians, particularly children, in situations of armed conflict and to cater for their needs in a post-conflict rehabilitation process. The draft resolution on children and armed conflict, that we hope will be adopted soon, constitutes an ample demonstration of this commitment.

Finally, I would be remiss in my duty if I concluded this statement without thanking the international humanitarian and human rights community who work so hard, most of the time putting their own lives at risk, to make a difference in the lives of children affected by armed conflict. We salute and support them in their work and encourage them to continue to render their much appreciated services for the benefit of less fortunate children, where ever they may be on this planet. In this way, life for many of these poor and innocent souls would, at long last, be worth living.

The President: I thank the representative of Gambia for his kind words addressed to me.

There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. In view of the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3.30 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.30 p.m.